

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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FM AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1153

INFO: RUEHBAC/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1217

AMEMBASSY LONDON

CINCPAC

AMEMBASSY SUVA

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

HICOMTERPACIS SAIPAN MARIANA ISLANDS

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT MORESBY 0048

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PP

SUBJECT: CURRENT SITUATION IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

1. THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION WAS OBTAINED DURING MY JANUARY 12-15 VISIT IN HONIARA, MY FIRST VISIT IN 13 MONTHS.
2. TIMETABLE TOWARD INDEPENDENCE: THE CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE IS SCHEDULED TO MAKE ITS REPORT ON APRIL 1, FOLLOWING WHICH THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY WILL DEBATE THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTION. NATIONAL ELECTIONS ARE EXPECTED IN MAY OR JUNE, TO BE FOLLOWED BY ADDITIONAL DISCUSSIONS IN THE NEW LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ABOUT THE CONSTITUTION AND ABOUT THE DATE OF INDEPENDENCE (TO BE IN THE FIRST HALF OF 1977). THE NEW CURRENCY IS TO BE INTRODUCED IN LATE 1976. AFTER INDEPENDENCE, THE SOLOMON ISLANDS PLANS TO JOIN THE UN AND SET UP ITS OWN DIPLOMATIC SERVICE.

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EM OBSTACLES: THERE IS OPPOSITION TO INDEPENDENCE IN 1977,

AND THE NEWLY EMERGING LABOR PARTY IS EXPECTED TO CAMPAIGN ON PLATFORM CALLING FOR DELAY. SOME SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS ARE ALSO EXPECTED TO RUN FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, ALSO CALLING FOR A DELAY IN THE DATE OF INDEPENDENCE. THE BRITS ARE WORRIED THAT A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF MEMBERS OF THE NEW LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY WILL BE ELECTED ON A DELAY-INDEPENDENCE PLATFORM AND THIS WOULD UPSET THE CAREFULLY PLANNED SCHEDULE FOR INDEPENDENCE AFTER A YEAR TO 18 MONTHS OF SELF-GOVERNMENT.

4. RELATIONS WITH PNG: THE DIPLOMATIC POSITION OF PNG HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY ERODED IN THE PAST 13 MONTHS. I HEARD MANY PRO-BOUGAINVILLE COMMENTS, AND THERE SEEMED TO BE A RESENTMENT THAT PNG WOULD NOT GIVE BOUGAINVILLE ITS INDEPENDENCE. I WAS TOLD THERE HAVE RECENTLY BEEN SPEECHES IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY CALLING ON THE GPNG TO RELEASE BOUGAINVILLE. SOME OBSERVERS THOUGHT THE PREVAILING SENTIMENTS WENT FURTHER. A CATHOLIC MISSIONARY WITH 39 YEARS EXPERIENCE IN THE SOLOMONS, BISHOP STEUVENBERG, TOLD ME THERE IS WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT BOUGAINVILLE SHOULD BE PART OF THE SOLOMONS, AND WOULD BE PART WERE IT NOT FOR A LINE THE WHITE MAN DREW. AN AMERICAN CATHOLIC NUN WITH SIX YEARS EXPERIENCE IN SOLOMONS SAID A LARGE SEGMENT OF THE POPULATION BELIEVES BOUGAINVILLE SHOULD BE PART OF THE SOLOMONS. GOVERNOR LUDDINGTON BELIEVES THESE SENTIMENTS ARE STRONG.

6. MAMALONI: THE BRITS BELIEVE MAMALONI'S POSITION IS STRONGER THAN EVER AS AFTER HIS OUSTER IT BECAME VERY CLEAR THAT THERE WAS NO ONE WHO COULD REPLACE HIM, AND HENCE HE WAS EASILY REELECTED CHIEF MINISTER. BRITS BELIEVE HE WILL BE REELECTED CHIEF MINISTER. BRITS BELIEVE HE WILL BE REELECTED TO LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY DURING UPCOMING NATIONAL ELECTIONS AND WILL BE AGAIN CHOSEN CHIEF MINISTER, NOT BECAUSE HE IS WIDELY LIKED AND RESPECTED (HE ISN'T) BUT BECAUSE SOLOMON ISLANDERS WILL PREFER THE DEVIL THEY KNOW AS INDEPENDENCE DRAWS NEAR. MAMALONI SEEMED MORE ASSURED AND MORE ARTICULATE THAN HE APPEARED TO BE 13 MONTHS AGO. GOVERNOR LUDDINGTON SAYS MAMALONI STILL SITS ON THE FENCE TO SEE WHICH WAY OPINION IS VEERING BEFORE HE DECIDES WHICH SIDE TO SUPPORT. ALSO SAID THAT WHILE MAMALONI HAS MATURED SOMEWHAT, HE IS STILL SOMETIMES VERY DIFFICULT TO WORK WITH, UNREASONABLE, CONFIDENTIAL

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TEMPERAMENTAL AND VERY TOUCHY.

6. LABOR: OBSERVERS GENERALLY AGREED THAT A MAJOR NEW FACTOR IN THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PICTURE IS THE EMERGENCE OF A LABOR MOVEMENT AROUND THE NUCLEUS OF THE SOLOMON ISLANDS GENERAL WORKERS UNION LED BY A RADICAL, DEMAGOGIC YOUNG GRADUATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PAPUAN NEW GUINEA, BART ULAFALU. HE IS FORMING WHAT OBSERVERS TERM AS THE FIRST REAL POLITICAL PARTY

IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS, AND INTENDS TO PRESENT CANDIDATES
IN SEVERAL, IF NOT ALL, ELECTORAL DISTRICTS IN THE UPCOMING
ELECTION. IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED THAT ULAFALU HIMSELF CAN
EASILY DEFEAT THE INCUMBENT FOR THE HONIARA SEAT. MOST
OBSERVERS CONSIDER HIM A MAJOR CHALLENGE TO MMAMALONI, BUT
GOVERNOR LUDDINGTON TOLD ME VERY CONFIDENTIALLY THAT ULAFALU
AND MAMALONI HAVE HELD SEVERAL SECRET MEETINGS. HENCE THEY
MAY BE WORKING OUT AN ACCOMMODATION.

7. LETCHER MINT: BOTH BRITS AND SOLOMON ISLANDERS
BROUGHT UP SUBJECT OF LETCHER MINT, BUT AS COMPANY HAS NOT
YET FOLLOWED UP ON ITS THREAT OF LEGAL ACTION, PEOPLE ARE
HOPING IT WILL ALL BLOW OVER.
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